



# Don't Be A Target For Dismissal

By John Girardi

I've been working in Human Resources for more than 25 years, many of those years as a Human Resource Manager and in my own business, working with a broad range of industries including automotive, manufacturing, supply chain, and retail. I don't love everything about the profession I have chosen, but one of the aspects I do love is that almost daily I have managers or business owners confide in me about what they think about the people that work for them. They tell me what they like about their star performers and they whinge to me about the people they are having problems with.

Imagine that, 25+ years of hearing, on an almost daily basis, what managers and business owners think about the various people that work for them. It's a position of privilege and it has given me some great insight into what goes on in organisations, about what can go wrong, and about how and why some employees come to be viewed as problem employees.

What's interesting is how rarely managers share with the people that report to them, how they rate their performance, especially with any real honesty. Managers make informal assessments about the performance of all the people who report to them. Whether we realise it or not, and whether it's shared or not. It's going on a lot and it's being talked about behind closed doors. It's in these conversations that reputations are made or broken.

Have you ever thought about the value that accompanies the reputation an employee has within an organisation? There is earning potential associated with that reputation. If an employee has earned a negative reputation, if they are perceived as having a poor work ethic, as someone who takes every opportunity to avoid work, then their opportunities for progression have been damaged and, unfortunately, they may never know it.

I think it's a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. Managers put the jigsaw pieces together, for each employee, to make sense of all the employees that report to them. If an employee avoids work, and sure most employees will do this to some extent, but if they regularly procrastinate when their boss is not around, in my experience, one way or another, the manager figures it out. A disgruntled colleague or a customer

mentions it, either to the manager, or to another employee, who then shares it with the manager. Or, during the course of a casual conversation with a manager, someone brings it up because they are annoyed that an employee is not pulling their weight. Or, the manager speculates about why an employee doesn't seem to get as much work done compared to other employees.

It's not about single occurrences, but it's about a pattern of behaviour. And while there can be some unreasonable managers, most managers I've come across are trying to make fair judgements. That's why I like the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle. One example that the manager observes, or that comes to their attention through other means, is one piece of the puzzle, but that doesn't give the whole picture. But as the pieces accumulate, the manager will have a hunch about a particular employee. Then the manager will look for more pieces to the puzzle, to see if that hunch is correct. Then when the pieces start accumulating and they have a consistency ("It's like every time I walk past, he seems to be texting on his phone"), the manager reaches a conclusion, 'maybe I've got a problem employee here'.

Employees who think their manager is not going to mind too much, given that nothing's been said to them in the past, should think again. How do I know this? I know from the conversations I've been having for more than 25 years. Importantly and unfortunately, much of this is never shared with the employees that come to be seen as "problems". It's why I am a big believer and promoter of managers having honest conversations with people, with tact, and hopefully with empathy and warmth. It's what I would want if someone had formed that view of me. It takes good communication skills, good people skills, and unfortunately a lot of managers lack these skills.

There are some employees that seem to spend a lot of their time avoiding work, on their phone, texting their friends, or on Facebook, taking excessively long breaks, or doing a whole lot of things, other than productive work. Of course, good workplaces are not prison camps; they are tolerant of people doing all the things we find enjoyable as social beings, talking about our weekend, taking breaks to have coffee with our colleagues, sharing what's funny about the work we are doing, and having a laugh.



Hopefully, the employees who work in your business enjoy their work, and do some socialising while they are at work, and (god forbid!) even have fun at work. But I will often advise new employees, especially young people in the early stages of their careers (and it's what I advise my daughter!), when they are at work, they should aim to develop a reputation for being a worker, for getting things done, not for being someone who is trying to avoid work and get away with things. And I advise them to always remember that those who control their ability to gain a promotion, will be tuned in to any clues that suggest they have a questionable work ethic. It's good advice that managers should give to their employees. After all, who wants to have a target on their back? Who wants to be a target for dismissal?

## About John Girardi

John Girardi is a human resources consultant who runs Girardi Human Resources. He works with a number of employers in the automotive industry to provide outsourced human resource support, including providing Fair Work advice, drafting employment contracts, performance management, management training, and recruitment.



You can find out more about Girardi Human Resources here: [www.girardi.com.au](http://www.girardi.com.au)

